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**PRESS PREVIEW: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1982 10 A.M. to 3 P.M.

SPECIAL EXHIBITION OF SAMUEL F. B. MORSE'S GALLERY OF THE LOUVRE AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 29, 1982. One of the most important nineteenth-century American paintings, Gallery of the Louvre, by Samuel F. B. Morse, artist and inventor of the telegraph and the Morse Code, goes on view in the National Gallery of Art's West Building December 19, 1982 -February 13, 1983. The painting was recently acquired on behalf of the Terra Museum of American Art in Evanston, Illinois, by Daniel J. Terra, Ambassador-at-Large for Cultural Affairs to President Reagan. The work was purchased from Syracuse University and is now, for the first time in over 100 years, being seen extensively in this country.

Suggested by the renowned American novelist James Fenimore Cooper, Gallery of the Louvre was painted between 1831 and 1833. The six by nine foot canvas is in the tradition of European "gallery pictures," so named because they depict paintings within a painting. The figures in the foreground represent Morse and an art student, Cooper with his family, and several people of different economic backgrounds symbolizing the universal appeal which Morse hoped the masterpieces in his painting would have.

As a young man, Morse studied in London with the foremost American history painter, Benjamin West, and in 1813 his painting Dying Hercules was awarded high honors by the Royal Academy. Two years later, having learned the art of portraiture, he returned to America where he painted General Lafayette, President John Adams, and Eli Whitney. In 1829 he left America for France where he hoped to acquire the technical expertise needed to gain important public commissions.

In Paris he was reunited with his friend Cooper who urged Morse to paint <u>Gallery of the Louvre</u>, a work which they conceived together to bring European art to nineteenth-century America and to heighten the young republic's cultural awareness. Morse and Cooper believed that this exposure was crucial to the development of the nation in the hope that someday it might become the cultural leader of the world.

To this end, Morse chose the Salon Carré of the Louvre as his subject. Exhibited in this gallery were works by Europe's greatest masters. Morse re-arranged them in the composition of his painting to show those which he felt were most significant. He produced small-scale likenesses of Leonardo's Mona Lisa and Claude's The Landing of Cleopatra as well as works by Rembrandt, Rubens, Titian, Poussin, Raphael, and Caravaggio. The painting will be on view in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art near the old masters, including Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Ginevra

de Benci, the only painting by Leonardo in the Western Hemisphere.

The public response to the painting itself did not measure up to Morse's and Cooper's expectations, and the tour in America was brief. This was the second major work which Morse had created to tour the nation. In 1821, the tour of Old House of Representatives, (Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington) containing 86 portraits, also had disappointing attendance.

Morse had expected the <u>Gallery of the Louvre</u> tour to provide sufficient funds to allow him to turn to scientific study. In 1835 he won an appointment as Professor of Literature of the Arts of Design at New York University and shortly thereafter invented the electric telegraph. Because of his several talents he came to be known as the "American Leonardo."

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Engel Amiot, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.